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# Continuing Efforts to Alleviate "Orange Pain" An Internship with the Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin

Loan Heilner  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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# **Continuing Efforts to Alleviate "Orange Pain"**

## **An Internship with the Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for SIT Vietnam: Culture, Social Change, & Development.  
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### Abstract

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This year marked the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vietnam's Agent Orange Disaster. Decades after the end of the war, Vietnamese people are still largely being affected by the remnants of the United States' Agent Orange herbicide sprays. Dioxin chemical has now been confirmed detrimental to human and environmental well-being, but unfortunately it still remains in high concentrations in certain areas of Vietnam. Dioxin chemical is passed on through genetics to new generations, but one of the leading causes of dioxin-related health defects today are due to environmental residue. In Da Nang, Agent Orange was stored and loaded at the local airbase during the war. As a result, there are still high amounts of dioxin within the soil in the area. A few of the known health effects of dioxin poisoning include birth deformities, paralysis, forms of cancer, skin lesions/rashes, and mental illnesses. All of these conditions inhibit victims of Agent Orange from having a socially "regular" life and puts strain on many families. The Da Nang Association for Victims of Agent Orange dedicates itself to lifting the spirits of those affected by Agent Orange by providing them with a caring, safe space and community. My internship with DAVA has allowed me to see first-hand the effectiveness of initiatives and local centers in Da Nang that aim to help victims assimilate themselves into society and overcome their suffering. I have had the opportunity to spend three weeks with a number of people suffering from various dioxin-related health issues and listen to their personal stories. Working at DAVA, I have also learned about the several ways in which the organization collaborates with the local government and community to reach out to Agent Orange victims in the Da Nang and Quang Nam region.

**Keywords:** Agent Orange, Stigma, Children, War, Vocational Education, Vietnam

## Acknowledgements

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Another important acknowledgement is for the Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (DAVA) for accepting me and welcoming me so warmly into the association. I would especially like to mention Nguyễn Thị Hiền, Nguyễn Thị Cam Vân, and my ISP Advisor Phan Thành Tiến for their guidance. I thank both the staff and the children at the DAVA centers for opening their community to me. I thoroughly enjoyed being able to spend the past three weeks with the DAVA family.

Finally, I would like to thank my two families in the United States and in Vietnam. I would like to thank my parents for allowing me to have this study abroad experience, and for raising me to have the best life possible. I would like to thank my Vietnamese family for welcoming me into their home and making it my home too. I am lucky to have two families.

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## **I. An Introduction to Agent Orange**

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War inevitably leaves catastrophe in its wake, but the use of Agent Orange is considered a particularly appalling horror of war. In contemporary Vietnam, the aftermath of the Vietnam War spans 55 years as Agent Orange continues to cause pain and suffering among the Vietnamese people. Agent Orange was first used when the United States government began to spray herbicides and defoliants as a war tactic in 1961, and continued to do so across areas of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia until 1972 (Agent Orange Record, 2010). The most infamous of these herbicides was called Agent Orange, named after the color of the stripe on the barrels in which it was stored. Collectively known as the “Rainbow Herbicides”, Agents White, Pink, Purple, Green, Orange and Blue were used across Vietnam’s terrain (History, 2011). In total, the United States Air Force (USAF) released roughly 73 million liters of herbicide sprays of which almost 12 million liters were Agent Orange (Martini, 2012). The idea of using chemical herbicides in war was with the intention of removing the foliage that served as refuge for the Viet Cong guerilla troops, while also targeting key resources such as crops and food sources. Roads, rivers, canals, and crops were hit with the defoliants, but affecting civilian peasant communities’ food sources was unavoidable. The effects of Agent Orange impacted far more people than just the Northern Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong forces.

The chemical component known as dioxin (TCDD- 2,3,7,8) is what makes Agent Orange a powerful ecocide, harmful to both environment and human health. Dioxin is found in small quantities within the environment and stored in the fatty tissue of animals. It is a by-product of manufacturing processes, but can also be produced naturally in events such as volcanic eruptions, or forest fires (WHO, 2016). These small levels of dioxin are not harmful, but the accumulation over years within the environment and food chain are what causes the chemical to

reach hazardous levels. Dioxin has a half-life of seven years, which means that the chemical compound takes seven years to break down to half its original concentration. In Vietnam today, many plant species in heavily sprayed areas are still unable to regrow, run-off has contaminated water systems, and ecosystems have been imbalanced (Tuoi Tre, 2013). This dioxin in the environment is transferred into the human body through contaminated water, or animal meats and has severe consequences on human health.

Initially, the USAF denied the dangers of dioxin towards humans but Dr. Arthur Galston, who was a leading, contributing botanist to the creation of Agent Orange, later became one of the most outspoken adversaries to the herbicide's use (Silverman, 2008). According to the US Department of Veteran's Affairs, the following health conditions are associated with Agent Orange/Dioxin:

- Skin conditions and skin diseases, such as chloracne
- Neurological disorders, such as Parkinson's Disease
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Miscarriages in pregnancy
- Certain forms of cancer: multiple myeloma, respiratory system cancers, Hodgkin's disease, prostate cancer, leukemia
- Birth defects, physical deformities, spina bifida

In Vietnam, each of these health conditions puts a heavy burden on individuals and their families, particularly rural families with limited access to health care.

## **II. The Establishment of DAVA**

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The Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange (VAVA) formed its Da Nang City branch on the 5th January 2005, known as the Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin or DAVA. Da Nang was an important location during the war, and the airbase was used to store and load barrels of herbicides onto aircrafts. Decades after the war, chemical residue in the old barrels has been found to contain an average of 5.96mg of dioxin and has

contaminated the soil in the areas surrounding the air base (Martini, 2012). DAVA caters to the needs of people both in Da Nang City and the outer Quảng Nam region who have been affected by Agent Orange dioxin exposure.

The DAVA workforce includes a number of office administration workers, directors, teachers, and general staff. The main body of DAVA is structured as follows:

**President**

Nguyễn Thị Hiền – Member of the Vietnam Standing Central Association

**Vice Presidents:**

Hoang Lien

Thanh Tra Lanh – Head of Social Department

Phan Thành Tiến – Head of Foreign Affairs

**Center Directors:**

Vo Thi Thu – Center 1 (Thanh Khe District)

Nguyễn Thị Cam Vâng – Center 3 (Hoa Vang District)

DAVA works with a coalition of other Da Nang City associations and organizations to support each other and raise awareness among the general Vietnamese public. The following entities are partners with the Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin:

- Da Nang Television and Radio
- Cong An Newspaper (Da Nang)
- Da Nang Newspaper (Da Nang People's Committee)
- Da Nang Veterans Association
- Da Nang University
- Da Nang Ministry of Education and Training
- Da Nang Young Entrepreneurs Association
- Da Nang Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA)

Each of these bodies contributes to DAVA in the form of publicity, funding, and donations.

DAVA also relies on private donations contributed towards its organization by both local Vietnamese people and foreigners. The city of Da Nang is a beneficial location for DAVA to be based; the main office is centrally situated within the city. Da Nang is Vietnam's third largest city, and a popular tourist destination. The DAVA staff often encounters tourists who seek out



the organization on their own to learn more about Agent Orange and offer their support through small donations and/or volunteer work.

### **III. The Mission of DAVA**

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The Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin aims to raise the optimistic spirit of AO/Dioxin victims and encourage them to learn vocational skills to create better lives in which they can overcome their disabilities. DAVA has performed duties such as organizing social events in which AO victims can participate, appealing to the Vietnamese government to provide benefits and assistance to victims, and fighting for justice by filing lawsuits against US chemical manufacturing companies of Agent Orange. Currently, DAVA is working to alleviate poverty among victims and their families because the stress of financial stability only adds to the hardship of physical disability.

As the leading association supporting victims of Agent Orange, DAVA strives to ensure that these people are not pushed aside or forgotten by society because of their disabilities. In fact, the organization has expanded to reach out to all people with varying disabilities, not just those directly affected by Agent Orange. DAVA dedicates specific attention to the care of children who have been affected by AO, as well as providing important rehabilitation and physiotherapy services to victims with inhibiting disabilities. Education is vital for the youth, and so DAVA helps to put children through school, and later vocational training. A key component of DAVA's mission is the effort to decrease stress and depression of AO victims by encouraging confidence and recovery. Positive interactions facilitated by DAVA help victims to live a fulfilling life despite the unwarranted consequences of dioxin chemical exposure.

Working in partnership with the local Da Nang media, such as television/radio and newspapers, DAVA attempts to raise awareness of the general public with regards to Agent

Orange effects and the work that the organization does. This effort is expanding on a global scale as more foreigners visit and invest in DAVA programs. DAVA continues to promote itself and inform people with disabilities that there is aid available, as well as encourage private donation from members of the community.

#### **IV. DAVA's Ongoing Efforts to Assist Victims of Agent Orange and Disadvantaged Children**

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One year after the establishment of DAVA, the association built two centers dedicated to the care, education, and rehabilitation of Agent Orange victims and disadvantaged children. Center 1 is located in Thanh Khê District, and was funded by BIDV Bank. Center 3 is the larger of the two facilities, located in the rural Hòa Vang District. The Da Nang People's Committee granted the land to DAVA, and UNICEF helped to sponsor the construction of this center. The centers are similar in terms of activities and resources, but, being the bigger facility, Center 3 also has a building dedicated to housing severely disabled individuals. The expansion is due to the realization that many families are unable to properly care for children with severe disabilities, and that these children often sit at home with little or no human interaction. Both centers cater not only to Agent Orange victims, but also to people with general mental or physical disabilities and orphaned children.

At each center there are classrooms where children spend time learning, drawing, and coloring. These classrooms have a designated stage area where the children practice songs and dances to perform at DAVA events. Additional rooms are assigned for various vocational and craft activities: incense stick production, decorative flowers, and sewing. The staff at the centers teaches the children who are able to use the machinery how to create the products and package them for selling. Each center also has a kitchen and dining area where lunch and afternoon snack

is served each day. Center 3 uses a main portion of the land for vegetable gardening and raising pigs, in order to sustain itself in terms of food supply. A small building is used to grow mushrooms that the center sells to donors to raise funds. By producing its own fresh vegetables and pork meat, the center reduces its expenses for feeding the children each day. The staff members at both DAVA centers are all dedicated to providing a safe, friendly environment for victims of Agent Orange to spend the day; therefore, the centers are open almost every day.

The DAVA centers are only one portion of DAVA's programs. The main initiative DAVA undertakes is its outreach program to families with members affected by Agent Orange/Dioxin in the Quảng Nam region. It is difficult to determine exactly if a medical condition has been caused by Agent Orange/Dioxin because the blood tests are only available in the United States and are far too expensive for impoverished Vietnamese families (MDCH, 2016). Nonetheless, DAVA has created its own method for assessing if a family suffers from Agent Orange-related disabilities. The association will look at the family's history, whether any members served in the war and in what capacities, as well as the area in which the family lives, and if there is more than one generation of disability apparent within the family. At present, DAVA is helping up to 500 families in Quảng Nam by providing monthly funding, medical insurance, and building stable houses. Often families must rely on the income of only one parent, since the other must stay at home and care for the child all day. For this reason, DAVA began to give roughly 200,000VND per month to each family; this amount has now been increased and families receive 400,000VND per month. DAVA also has helped numerous families to start to raise pigs, chickens, and/or ducks in the yard for both self-sustainability and to sell for money. For families with severely disabled children who cannot move themselves, DAVA has helped to add wheelchair accessible entrances to houses so that children can be brought outside during the

day. A large portion of DAVA fundraising and donations are dedicated to this family outreach program.

For families with disabled children who attend the centers, but are not necessarily Agent Orange victims, DAVA still provides a monthly stipend and health insurance so medical fees are minimal, if not free. DAVA recognizes that there are individuals who suffer from disabilities but are still fully mentally capable and can attend school, so the association gives out scholarships helping children go to school, and later attend vocational college. The centers are unable to support a person forever, and at some point one will have to fend for oneself in society.

Currently, there are 50 children who are attending schools with the aid of DAVA scholarships. The funding for these scholarships, as well as for the rest of DAVA's programs, is raised from private donations, but the organization holds two main fundraising events every year. On August 6, 2004 the Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee approved the 10<sup>th</sup> of August as national "Day for Vietnam's Agent Orange/Dioxin Victims." The Vietnamese government encourages collective effort to help those in the community in need, promoting the saying "Whole leaves wrap torn leaves (DAVA, 2009)." Also at the end of each year, DAVA sends out a letter to all of its partners to appeal for donations to contribute towards the Têt Holiday celebrations in the upcoming year. On both occasions, DAVA invites sponsors and the general public to contribute towards maintaining the programs in place.

## **VI. My Internship Details**

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I worked with DAVA for a period three and a half weeks, distributing my time between the two centers for victims of Agent Orange and disadvantaged children. On Thursdays, the centers were not open so I spent the day in the main office with my ISP Advisor, Mr. Tiển, reading documents on Agent Orange and discussing about the organization. At the centers, my

main responsibility was to take care of the children: teach them basic subjects such as the alphabet and numbers in both Vietnamese and English, help them to draw and color, teach them songs and dances, and help feed the more severely disabled children. I noticed that all of the children thoroughly enjoyed spending their days at the center. On mornings I worked at Center 3, the DAVA minibuss would pick up the staff and children en route to the center. Every child was always ready and waiting on the sidewalk for the minibuss, even in the rain. Although the centers did not have any set daily schedule, it did not matter because the children are mainly at the centers for community interaction. The centers give the children an opportunity to play with their friends and teachers, spending time with peers instead of sitting at home alone. Even on my first day at the center, the children were eager to include me in their games and share their artwork with me.

In addition to caring for the children, I would assist the DAVA staff in various capacities. Keeping the center relatively clean in the wake of children at play was a constant duty, collecting colored pencils, paper, books etc. On one occasion I helped a staff member at Center 1 handcraft over 100 wedding invitations. The products that are made at the centers are sold to sponsors, the Da Nang Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) and Yellow Bee School for Orphans. These products needed to be packaged, and the extras we delivered to a shopping center to be sold to the general public. The members of staff at the centers also included individuals who were disabled and Agent Orange victims themselves. The staff itself was like a small family within DAVA; we could sit around a small table and share lunch with each other every day. Every member of DAVA's staff made me feel welcomed.

In my ISP Proposal I wrote that I hoped that during my time with DAVA I would potentially be able to contact an American partner of the organization. I had the opportunity to meet Trinh and Dean Kokkoris, who live in New York City but were visiting Vietnam for a couple weeks. Dean was one of the lawyers working on the VAVA lawsuit against 36 US chemical manufacturing companies in 2004. The result of the lawsuit was a case dismissal and rejected appeal; however, it may have pressured the US government into taking more action to fund the dioxin clean up efforts happening at present. Trinh, a Vietnamese-American woman, has started her own non-profit based in New York City called the Vietnamese Language, Arts and Cultural Center (VLACC). VLACC serves the Vietnamese-American and immigrant community in NYC, offering both Vietnamese language classes as well as second language English lessons. The main initiative of VLACC is to fundraise and support non-profit organizations in Vietnam, especially organizations that deal with Agent Orange victims. VLACC has been working with DAVA for the past twelve years. I have remained in contact with Trinh and will continue to do so because I hope to be able to work with her and her organization this upcoming summer of 2017.

The second American couple I was fortunate enough to meet was Esther and Paul Bucher, both of whom had served four years in the late 1960s in Vietnam as English teachers during the war and have now returned. The two of them are currently living in Quảng Ngãi province looking to work with victims of Agent Orange and children with disabilities. Esther works as an occupational therapist, a profession DAVA is very interested in and is deciding if Esther can help to improve DAVA programs.

Another component of my internship was interviews with DAVA's local media partners, Da Nang Television/Radio and Báo Da Nang newspaper. In both interviews, I was asked about

myself, and my life story, why I was studying in Vietnam, and why I was working with DAVA. I described the work DAVA currently does to support victims of Agent Orange, as well as my specific responsibilities working at DAVA. The interviews were a combination of promotion for DAVA and sharing my own life story with the Da Nang community. Both interviewers were very intrigued by me and asked many questions about my family and my plans for my future.

## **VI. Case Studies**

The following two case studies describe two people, one from each DAVA center, with whom I spent a significant amount of time with during my internship. Although these cases do not necessarily describe direct Agent Orange-related disabilities, it exhibits how DAVA has expanded its community center program to include those who are suffering from all disabilities. For this reason, the centers are titled “Center for Victims of Agent Orange and Misfortunate [Disadvantaged] Children.”

### **Lý Văn Công (Center 1- Thanh Khe District)**



**Image 1: Myself with Lý Văn Công at**

Lý Văn Công is a 22 year-old man who commutes to Center 1 every morning that the center operates. His family, originally from Hanoi, is currently living in Da Nang. Công was born deaf and dumb, but has created his own means of communication to express himself. He finds the fact that he cannot hear the most restrictive aspect of his daily life, and he uses hand gesture and writing to talk to people. Công's lives with his family in Hoa Khanh District of Da Nang roughly 5km away from Center 1. No other members of Công's family suffer from disability or Agent Orange related health problems. So each day Công travels to the center with one of the staff and leaves to return home at 3:00pm.

In terms of how he is treated by those around him, he has not felt discriminated against in reaction to his disability: "People treat me very well and are willing to help me whenever I need it." However, his disability does make his options for employment far more limited. Công first started coming to the center because he heard that it was an opportunity to learn vocational training. He hopes to be able to study and work on his own in the future, but he most enjoys the community interaction at the centers. He said that he likes to come to the center every day because he can spend time with his friends, the children, and the teachers at the center. Công is an example of a young adult that DAVA realizes cannot spend his time at the center forever, and will need to find some way to integrate into society. He would be a prime candidate for a DAVA scholarship to study and attend a vocational school in order to find a stable job.

Công was someone I spent much time with at the center each week, and we became friends over my internship period. In the first week at the center, Công was eager to show me how the center runs. He, his two friends, and I were all of similar age and spent time together drawing, making crafts, and sharing stories about our lives. The group of friends taught me how to use the machine for making incense sticks, and then showed me the process of laying the



sticks out in the sun to dry. We worked together to pack the boxes of incense packages, ready to be sold and delivered. At first, I was unsure if Công was deaf because at times he seemed to be able to hear or react to noise, but when I would call his name to get his attention he did not seem to hear me. I believe that sometimes his ears are able to sense noise without necessarily hearing. However, this rarely affected the conversations we had with each other. He shared with me some aspects about his life and his friends in Da Nang through photographs he had saved on his cell phone. Whenever I did not fully understand what he was trying to tell me, he would write it down for me to read and translate. The dynamic between us was interesting, especially because Vietnamese language uses relational pronouns. Công is one year older than me so I was inclined to call him “anh”, but since I was technically a member of the DAVA staff he would insist on calling me “chị”. Yet, we would interact as equals in a friendship.

Nguyễn Hoa Niên (Center 3- Hoa Vang District)



Image 2: Nguyen Hoa Nien playing at Center 3

Nguyễn Nghi is 52 years old, and lives at Center 3 with his son during the week. His son, Nguyễn Hoa Niên, is 10 years old and is one of the more severely disabled children at this center. They originate from Quảng Nam and their home is about 20km away from the center. Niên does not have motor skills or control of his body, but mentally he is sharp and intelligent. He was born this way, unable to walk and only partially able to control his right arm. Although a very inhibiting disability, this case does not appear to be Agent Orange related. There are no other relatives in the family with Agent Orange/Dioxin related health issues. Nghi has five children in total, Niên is the youngest, and his four daughters were born healthy babies. Nghi's sister, Vâng, is currently the director of the center, and this is how he discovered the safe space to bring his son. Nghi says that his son and the rest of his family have never been mistreated because of Niên's disability; in fact, the local community and extended family are very kind and willing to care for and assist Niên.

For a poor rural family like Niên's, life at home is a very difficult circumstance. The biggest challenges for Niên are that he cannot feed or use the toilet on his own. His hands are not able to grasp chopsticks or a spoon, and his inability to walk leads to soiling his clothes multiple times a day. For those caring for him, the inability to communicate with words leaves them at a loss of understanding what he needs. However, there must be someone available to care for Niên all day and every day. The Nguyễn family needs the center. Nghi and his wife must work every day to generate income for the family, and Niên's four sisters either also work or attend school. At the center Niên is not only cared for, but he has a chance to interact with other children. Vâng says that she has noticed Niên is very happy at the center and does not like to leave to go home.

During my time at Center 3, spending time with Niên was one of my most favorite activities. It is visible how much he enjoys spending time with all the people at the center. As

soon as he saw a fellow volunteer, Nobuyo, and me the largest smile would emerge on his face. He loves to play catch and build with toy blocks, but his favorite activity is to play video games on a cellphone. The ease with which he is able to navigate a smartphone and its apps shows how sharp his mind is, and how quickly he can learn. Sometimes during afternoon snack time, I would sit with Niên and help him drink his milk from a straw. I noticed that the other children at the center also help to take care of Niên, feeding him or including him in their games. One afternoon, while two of the other boys were wrestling each other, Niên fell over and hit his head on the floor and both boys rushed to make sure Niên was okay. While the children play outside in the center's courtyard, Niên will sit at the door smiling and laughing while he watches everyone. It is apparent how much the people at the center love and care for Niên.

## **VII. DAVA improvements and suggestions for future sustainability**

Upon completion of my internship, I have had a few suggestions for DAVA to consider in the future, which I have shared with Cô Hiền and others members of the staff. DAVA's main concern is to continue fundraising and ensure that the existing programs in place can be maintained. I believe that in addition to this, DAVA can consider looking into special education programs and curriculum. From my experiences working at the two centers, I found that there are many children with mild disabilities that have very sharp minds and can write beautifully. These children should not be limited to drawing and coloring every day, and should be given the opportunity to learn real schooling subjects. Special education programs will help to teach the children in a way that caters most to their needs.

The centers should also ensure that there are qualified, knowledgeable vocational staff members available. Center 3 currently is not using any of its sewing machines because the previous teacher retired. It is important to find a replacement teacher so that the machines do not

continue to sit unused. Sewing is a valuable skill to be learned and will provide an extra activity for the center.

Lastly, I think it could benefit the association to write and publish a book portraying the Agent Orange issue in Vietnam and the work DAVA does today with the use of case studies of families DAVA works with in its outreach program. The book should ideally be bilingual, written in Vietnamese and English, and include a compilation of complementary photographs. I believe that a book like this could help to raise more funds for DAVA, especially if it could be sold in the US; but this book could also help to raise the general public's awareness. Unlike articles and museums with pieces on Agent Orange victims, the book would give more in depth stories about real people and their life stories.

### **VIII. Personal growth and overall assessment of the internship experience**

Completing my internship, I have realized how little information I previously knew on Agent Orange usage during the war. It was such a small portion of Vietnam War material taught both in my high school and at university. After working with DAVA, I have broadened my knowledge on AO/Dioxin, its effects, and how it continues to haunt Vietnamese communities 55 decades after the Agent Orange Disaster. I am thankful for the opportunity to work with Agent Orange victims myself, and meet them in person. When the SIT program took our group to the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, I was frightened and wary of my ISP topic after walking through the Agent Orange exhibits. Nonetheless, I am pleased that I pursued my topic, and I have learned that it is important to listen to people and their stories. I have met a number of people at the centers who have been enthusiastic to share their experiences with me as a disabled person living in Da Nang. I find that once you are familiar with someone and know more details of their life and family, you see them for far more than their disabilities. This was particularly

evident to me working at Center 3 with the younger children, because I realized that they are simply children with love to share. Their disabilities may inhibit their day-to-day functioning, but it should not affect their relationships towards people. I believe this is why every member of staff at the DAVA centers cares for the children as if they were their own.

My internship has given me many contacts in Da Nang, a city in which I previously did not know anyone. I have had the opportunity to meet some of the partnering organizations DAVA works with such as Care the People, an Italian based shelter caring for orphaned children in the heart of Da Nang. As I previously mentioned, meeting Trinh Kokkoris and learning about her VLACC organization has given me the opportunity to potentially continue work with non-profits in Vietnam focused on Agent Orange. Also knowing VLACC, I now have somewhere to continue Vietnamese language classes in the US and further improve my language skills. Meeting people over three weeks in Da Nang, I have now formed a community of my own that I would be eager to visit when I return to Vietnam in the future.

DAVA welcomed me so warmly onto their staff, and the president Cô Hiền has told me there is always a place for me at DAVA once I have finished university. On a more personal note, I have greatly valued the ISP experience because it has given me the chance to do meaningful work in my hometown. The people I encountered in Da Nang were overjoyed and moved when they learned that I was born in Da Nang's Hải Châu hospital. On the weekends when I was not working, I would go visit my Vietnamese family in Điện Bàn just outside of Da Nang. The combination of being independent, working during the week, interacting with the DAVA family, and sharing important moments with my own family made Da Nang begin to feel like a home to me.

I am overwhelmingly grateful for how positive and valuable my ISP Internship with DAVA has been. The work DAVA undertakes to care for disadvantaged people in Da Nang and Quảng Nam is admirable and effective. I would highly recommend anyone who is interested in health care or social welfare services to learn more about DAVA. DAVA and its initiatives exhibit the need for the greater community to contribute and nurture those who are suffering: “*Lá lành đùm lá rách*” / *Warm leaves wrap torn leaves*.

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